THEMES IN ADULT SELF-ESTEEM

By

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study, using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954), examined what enhances or detracts from adult self-esteem. A sample of 13 females and 7 males, ages 24 – 49, from a small urban church were selected as a study group from a normal adult population. Critical Incident interviews, lasting one and a half hours, resulted in 113 incidents. Subjects also completed a form recording age, sex, marital status and also completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. These data were used to compare subject characteristics to categories formed from the critical incidents. From the incidents, five basic categories were formed: Confirmation by Others, Overcoming Deficits, Acceptance by Others, Sense of Mutuality and Sense of Achievement. Categories contained 16 to 27 incidents each and each category was contributed to by at least 50% of the subjects. These categories demonstrated an acceptable level of interjudge reliability. Comparison between the investigator and a colleague in categorizing 50 incidents resulted in 92% agreement. Secondary examination between subject characteristics and categories indicated that the majority of data came from 30 to 36 year-olds and that no low self-esteem subjects were represented in the study.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Review of Related Literature

The Problem

Counsellors of adults frequently notice a concern in the area of self-esteem with their clients. All but the most behavioristic of counselling models would consider it appropriate to attempt to improve the client's self-esteem. Many theories of psychotherapy and child development emphasize the importance of self-esteem and its contribution to mental health.

Such personality theorists as Rogers, Murphy, Horney, and Adler have regarded a favorable self attitude as important. Earlier than these, psychologists and sociologists such as William James in 1890 and later G.H. Mead and Charles Cooley provided a basic appreciation for self-esteem, but they did not provide a specific theoretical framework for discussion and investigation.

A number of studies have shown that low self-esteem is associated with various measures of emotional disturbance such as depression (Beck, 1967; Rosenberg, 1965), manifest anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and sensitivity to criticism (Coopersmith, 1967).

Coopersmith also found positive correlations with high
self-esteem and some other factors such as novelty and independence of judgement, decreased likelihood of both displaying and being unable to cope with stress and anxiety, and more willingness to speak up when their responses are likely to evoke anger.

Wylie (1974) reports that more research has been devoted to self-esteem than to all the other aspects of the self-concept combined, probably indicating its relevance in emotional disturbances.

Despite the significance given to self-esteem, there is a lack in the adult counselling literature of methods to improve self-esteem that is based on research data.

This problem has sources in the lack of agreement as to what constitutes adult self-esteem and as to how it is influenced. In a review of the literature on self-esteem conceptualization, Wells and Marwell (1976) state that, "Self-esteem is a deceptively slippery concept about which there is a good deal of confusion and disagreement. One of the most frequently noted properties of the self-esteem literature has been its rather indeterminant character" (p. 5). Wylie (1976) has noted that there are a great number of self-esteem studies repeatedly resulting in null or weak findings.

Many self-esteem researchers have chosen a few specific components of self-esteem to indicate an overall self-esteem rating or have attempted to look at self-esteem as a unitary
concept. Others have found that factors long assumed to influence self-esteem, for example, socio-economic status (Rosenberg, 1979) account for little of the variability. It follows that difficulty in describing self-esteem has lead to difficulties in developing methods to improve it.

Scope of the Study

Because self-esteem has been a "slippery concept" and there is a lack of research into factors contributing to it, this study was planned to discover from adults what did contribute to their self-esteem. This can be seen as a basic step necessary for the description of adult self-esteem.

The information in this study was gathered using Flanagan's Critical Incident Technique, in which subjects reported on their own experience (Flanagan, 1954). Using this method, respondents were asked to describe incidents that enhanced or detracted from their self-esteem. Self-esteem was defined for the subjects as feeling good or bad in their opinions of themselves.

In studying an adult sample, it is important not to assume that adults are a homogeneous population, nor adulthood a single developmental stage. So in this study, after the incidents were categorized, the results were compared to various characteristics of the subjects. These
characteristics were age, sex, marital status, and self-esteem score as measured by the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965 & 1979).

It is hoped that this study of what enhances and detracts from adult self-esteem will contribute to the knowledge base on adult self-esteem. The information might also be used in developing self-esteem assessment tools and planning interventions to improve adult self-esteem.

Review of Related Literature

It has been indicated that although there are numerous self-esteem theories and a great deal of research into self-esteem, the literature is still of rather indeterminant character. The review will describe a variety of definitions of self-esteem and some research in the area. It will be noted that the research lacks investigations of events contributing to adult self-esteem. The critical incident technique will be described as a way of eliciting those events.
Definitions of Self-Esteem

As mentioned there is much disagreement in the literature describing self-esteem. One area of disagreement is the meaning of the term self-esteem, which has been given different names and definitions by various theorists. Wells (1976) lists a varied assortment of names including self-love, self-confidence, self-respect, self-acceptance, self-evaluation, self-worth, sense of adequacy, self-ideal congruence and ego or ego-strength.

Wylie (1974) points out that terms such as the above are not synonymous nor do they have corresponding operational definitions and also that the terms are very intertwined and overlapping, making clear differentiation impossible. Some examples of varying usages that she gives are, self-acceptance as respecting oneself, self-esteem as being proud of oneself, and optimum self-esteem manifested as a small discrepancy between self-description and ideal self ratings on specific measuring instruments. For her own work, she chose the term self-regard as a generic term indicating an overall or very general evaluative attitude towards self.

Morris Rosenberg, a widely cited self-concept researcher, characterizes a person as having a high self-esteem when, "he has self-respect, considers himself a person of worth."
Appreciating his merits, he nonetheless recognizes his faults . . . . He doesn't necessarily consider himself better than most others but neither does he consider himself worse" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 54).

Stanley Coopersmith, for his study of the antecedents of self-esteem, defines self-esteem as, "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 5-6).

In his editorial forward to Webster and Sobiezek's Sources of Self-Evaluation (1974), Morris Zelditch contrasts Coopersmith's and Rosenberg's view of self-esteem as a global personality trait with the interactionist's conception that self-evaluation is relative to the structure of the social situation.

Another confusion in the self-esteem literature is pointed out by Wells (1976). Although self-esteem is generally viewed as a valuational trait, there are two quite distinct processes suggested in the literature: evaluation and affection, two terms which are intended to reflect a distinction between instrumentality and emotionality. Self-evaluation or instrumentality refers to observing oneself in
relation to achieving valued ends and eliciting social rewards. Self-affection or emotionality refers to the emphasis on the emotional concomitants of self-evaluation; how one feels about oneself and one's personal worth isn't entirely determined by how good one is in a utilitarian sense. One may also be valuing the self in terms of its own moral or existential worth.

Measurement of Self-Esteem

Along with a variety of definitions of self-esteem there are a variety of studies attempting to measure changes around the self-esteem construct. Most of these fall into two categories. The first examines the relationship between self-esteem and an independent variable while the second category has self-esteem as the independent variable of some other dependent variable of interest.

An example of the first type is an exploration of the enhancement of social self-esteem by Marshall and Christie (1982a, 1982b). These studies demonstrated how a self-management procedure of repetition of positive self-evaluations enhanced the social self-esteem of subjects who were markedly low in this quality.

Marshall and Christie's studies offer minimal enlightenment to the question at hand because one cannot
isolate the specific events or incidents which increased a subject's self-esteem in their studies. After a series of two single-case studies and three group studies in which the researchers attempted to become increasing more specific about which treatment factor was producing the benefit, the conclusion made was that:

the cueing procedure . . . and the current two reinforcement procedures that employed either low frequency pleasurable behaviors or high frequency neutral behaviors as supposed reinforcers, all led to improvement's . . . . None of the other procedures produced such marked changes in behavior although most of the procedures based on reinforcement principles did improve subjects somewhat. (1982b, p. 95)

It can be seen from these conclusions that the events involved in this study were subsumed under general categories of behavioral variables and thus cannot now be identified. This is true of much of the research about influences on self-esteem.

The second type of study has self-esteem as the independent variable. That approach is the opposite of the question of this study which has self-esteem as the variable dependent on specific critical incidents and so does not provide helpful data.

There are no published critical incident studies on self-esteem. The study most similar to the present one is the American Institute for Research's study on improving the
quality of life (Flanagan, 1978). The first part of this study was the collection of critical incidents answering various questions about important or satisfying experiences, changes in the quality of life, sources of pleasure or trouble, and incidents making strong positive or negative impact.

These questions could be generally described as asking what made people feel good or bad about their life while the study at hand asks what made people feel good or bad about themselves. At this general level, there may be some similarities in the resulting categorization of incidents, so the results of this part of the AIR study are described. The study found 15 categories under five major headings as criteria for defining the quality of life for Americans. They were as follows:

1. Physical and Material Well-Being
   A. Material well-being and financial security
   B. Health and personal safety

2. Relations with Other People
   C. Relations with spouse (girlfriend or boyfriend)
   D. Having and raising children
   E. Relations with parents, sibling, and other relatives
   F. Relations with others

3. Social, Community, and Civic Activities
   G. Activities related to helping or encouraging others
   H. Activities related to local and national governments
4. Personal Development and Fulfillment

I. Intellectual development
J. Personal understanding and planning
K. Occupational role
L. Creativity and Personal expression

5. Recreation

M. Socializing
N. Passive and observational recreational activities
O. Active and participatory recreational activities.

(Flanagan, 1978, pp. 139-140)

**Self-Esteem and Self-Concept Development**

Two studies with the most relevant research to the present project are Rosenberg's work on the social and developmental factors involved in self-esteem formation (1979) and Coopersmith's investigation of the antecedents of self-esteem (1967).

Although Rosenberg's work was actually centred on self-concept formation, he regarded self-esteem as its most important aspect, mainly because it was one of the main motivational forces directing an individual. Discussion of self-esteem as the evaluation component of self-concept was found throughout his work. This could be seen in his four principles of self-concept formation. He developed these principles from others' research and used them to explain his own outcomes with a mid-childhood to late adolescence sample.
The four principles were reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-attribution, and psychological centrality. The principle of reflected appraisals "holds that people . . . are deeply influenced by the attitudes of others toward the self and that, in the course of time, they come to view themselves as they are viewed by others" (p. 63). Several related ideas influenced this principle. These three ideas were: how particular others view us, how we believe they view us, and the attitudes of the community as a whole on how one should play one's roles. Each of these valuations by others affected the individual's self-evaluation.

The second principle, social comparisons, described the fact that people judge and evaluate themselves by comparison to certain individuals, groups, or social categories. These comparisons led individuals to make positive, neutral or negative self-ratings. Two helpful categories of social comparison were described. The first was a superior-inferior comparison in relation to some criterion measure and the second was a normative comparison on the lines of deviance-conformity as defined by particular social environments.

The self-attribution principle referred to "the bases on which people draw conclusions about their own motives or underlying characteristics and how they go about verifying their tentative conclusions" (p. 71). This was further described as the individual's observation of his overt
behavior as representing a major basis for drawing conclusions about his inner motives, states, or traits.

The last principle was psychological centrality, holding that "the self-concept is not a collection but an organisation of . . . components and that these are hierarchically organised and inter-related in complex ways" (p. 75). Rosenberg pointed out that centrality was especially significant in understanding any self-concept component's effect on self-esteem. For example, a student who doesn't care about being liked by classmates will not suffer a lowering of self-esteem when this occurs.

The first two principles, reflected appraisals and social comparisons, are more clearly related to social aspects but the latter two are more purely psychological although still including social influence factors.

Coopersmith's work (1967) was directly aimed at self-esteem issues. His research question was, "What are the conditions that lead an individual to value himself and to regard himself as an object of worth?" (p. vii). His results supported four factors: success, values, aspirations, and defenses, which were seen as the determining variables of self-esteem.
The success factor yielded results contrary to the conventional American wisdom that material wealth, education, and status are the bases for determining favorable self-appraisal. Coopersmith found that the immediate effective interpersonal environment was the relevant frame of reference within which one determined subjective appraisals of success. Even given the subjectivity of the frame of reference, Coopersmith still found he could state some general bases for judgements of success in his study population of middle-class American preadolescents.\(^1\) These were:

a) Acceptance - manifested by parental care and attention,

b) Possibilities of individual expression and dissent - manifested by open discussion within well-defined limits, and

c) Academic performance - judged by competence relative to the members of one's group.

The second factor, values, differed from the expected hypothesis that people usually place the greatest value weights on those areas of performance and capacity in which

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\(^1\) Coopersmith's subjects were male, although in his results he usually refers to "persons" or "children."
they excel. The findings showed that persons at all levels of esteem tend to employ very similar standards to judge their worth. These standards are internalized as self-values from the general social norms of one's group.

Although shared standards resulted in emphasizing and valuing the same goals, individual differences were seen in how appraisal of attainment of these goals is made. This interpretation and weighting process was considered by Coopersmith as more a part of people's defensive capacities than of their self-value preferences.

Aspirations was the third self-esteem factor. Worthiness was judged by comparing one's actual performance and capacities with one's personal standards and aspirations. Boys who differed in self-esteem did not differ in public goals they espoused, but differing self-esteem levels resulted in markedly different personal goals. More favorable self-attitudes were associated with higher standards that were then objectively obtained. Persons with low self-esteem were less likely to believe success would occur and this resulted in an expression of anticipated failure which decreased motivation and probably contributed to occurrences of such failure.

The final factor was defenses or, manner of responding to devaluation. Coopersmith's results showed that children with high self-esteem were less likely to display distress and anxiety and were better able to deal with threats when they
did arise. A limitation of the findings for this factor was that they were based on reports of the mothers of the subjects rather than on results of projective tests. However, results of projective tests generally support the same conclusion.

In addition to these four factors, Coopersmith found some interesting differences in the boys with medium self-esteem. They showed a tendency to hold strong value positions, be more dependent on their parents and have an ambiguous sense of self-worth. This led Coopersmith to suggest that, rather than medium self-esteem being merely an intermediate part of the range of self-esteem, it may well have reflected the consequences of an uncertain self-appraisal.

There are similarities in the conclusions of these two researchers. Rosenberg's idea of reflected appraisals and Coopersmith's factors of success and values were all based on the importance of the influence of opinions, standards, and values of significant others on the individual's self-attitude. The performance of others was also a basis for self-judgements in Rosenberg's social comparison principle and Coopersmith's success factor.

Both authors also commented on how one observes one's own behavior, although they did so in different ways.
Coopersmith's aspirations factor showed his subjects judging their esteem by comparing their performance with their own standards while Rosenberg's self-attribution principle described individuals who determine their motives and characteristics by observing their performance and its outcomes. This self-attribution was highly selective, both in what the individual paid attention to and in how it was interpreted. This selectivity enhances self-esteem in success situations and protects it in failure situations. This selective capacity is very similar to Coopersmith's defenses factor in which he described defenses as, "representing the ability to resist or reject devaluing stimuli and events" (1967, p. 248) and so protect self-esteem.

The emphases of both these researchers on the significance of others in the immediate environment, and on comparing performance to self-standards, are factors that may appear in the answers to the present research question of what enhances or detracts from adult self-esteem.

**Critical Incident Technique**

This research question was considered best answered by the Critical Incident Technique. This method consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential
usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles (Flanagan, 1954).

The technique developed out of Flanagan's work for the Aviation Psychology Program in the U.S. Army Air Forces. It was more formally developed by some of the same psychologists at the American Institute for Research after World War II. This technique has been given a broad variety of applications including measures of typical performance or proficiency, selection, and classification (for jobs), job design, and counselling and psychotherapy.

An incident in this technique is defined as, "any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act" (p. 327). The incident is critical if "the purpose or content is fairly clear to the observer and . . . its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects" (p. 327). In the present study, the observer is the one to whom the critical incident affecting self-esteem has occurred. An example of similar research is found in some of the more recent work of the American Institute for Research, in which 6,500 incidents were collected from a broad spectrum of Americans around the question of what contributed to their own quality of life (Flanagan, 1978). The results of this study
have been described previously, on page 9.

The critical incidents are collected by interviews with observers qualified to report, in the present research these are the subjects themselves. They are considered qualified in that they can describe incidents which made them feel better or worse in their opinion of themselves. The objectivity of results in this type of research is obtained by sorting the incidents into categories which then would contain the same report from a number of independent observers.

**Categorization of Incidents**

There are a number of ways that a set of incidents could be divided into categories, a principle consideration of such a choice is the use to be made of the data. Flanagan remarked that although insight, judgement, and experience are applied to the categorization task, in the present state of psychological knowledge, the task is more subjective than objective. One way of checking categories is to submit them to several reviewers who should attempt to place a selection of critical incidents into the tentative categories provided. This process can identify needs for redefinition and development of new categories. In the light of any changes, the definitions are re-examined in relation to each incident classified in that category.
Flanagan (1954) provided considerations to be kept in mind in establishing headings for major areas and in stating critical requirements at the selected level of generality. These are listed below:

1. The headings should indicate a clear-cut and logical organization.
2. Titles should convey meaning in themselves.
3. The list of statements should be homogeneous, i.e., the headings for either areas or requirements should be parallel in content and structure.
4. Headings of a given type should all be of the same level of importance.
5. The headings used should be such that findings in terms of them will be easily applied and maximally useful.
6. The list of headings should be comprehensive and cover all incidents having significant frequencies.

Reliability and Validity

Andersson and Nilsson (1964) have studied several aspects of the reliability and validity of the critical incident technique. They reviewed their own study which collected over 1800 incidents to analyze the job of store managers in a Swedish grocery company. In that study, critical incidents
pertaining to the job of store manager were collected from four groups -- superiors, managers, assistants, and customers. Employees received a questionnaire and all participants were interviewed. Classification of incidents resulted in groupings of 86 subcategories and 17 categories in 3 major areas. The review of this study covers both data collection and categorization aspects.

Data Collection:

The important question asked here was whether the collection of data had been sufficiently comprehensive to include all types of behavioral units that the method might have been expected to cover. To discover this, Andersson and Nilsson compared incidents grouped according to which of five interviewers collected them. Five percent of the incidents from each group were placed in a new grouping so that 20 groupings contained all of the incidents. In this way, it was determined how the number of subcategories increased with the number of subcategories increased very rapidly. Eighty-one percent of the 86 subcategories appeared by the fourth group and 95% by the 15th group, that is, when 75% of the incidents were included. The researchers concluded that the collection of data had not been stopped too soon.

One way reliability was questioned in this study was between different data collection methods: interviews and
questionnaires, and between the five interviewers. The researchers wanted to know if these factors affected the number of incidents collected. There were some differences found in numbers of incidents collected by interview from certain classifications of personnel but still, the type of content was concluded to be similar from each interviewer. Although the questionnaires yielded fewer incidents, again the type of content was very similar to the interview material.

Categorization:

Another aspect of the reliability question was around the area of categorization which has been seen by various researchers as subjective and difficult. To test the agreement between various raters, 12 pairs of independent raters were instructed to place 100 incidents each in the 86 subcategories. The results showed only moderate agreement on the subcategories, but when comparison between the 17 major categories was made, the percentage agreement was quite strong. The conclusion was that the category system chosen was plausible and not too subjective.

The validity of the critical incident technique rests on its success at including all the important aspects of the topic being questioned. This was tested in Andersson and Nilsson's study in two ways.
In the first way, the contents of the literature for training the store managers was analyzed and compared to the categories and subcategories. Although the literature had some material equivalent to the categories, it was generally of too broad a scope to assist validity.

The other way validity was reviewed was by checking with a large number of judges whether the incidents collected were actually viewed as important to the store manager position. Three hundred judges, mainly store employees, filled in a rating form in which the 86 subcategories were rated on a six-point scale from 0 (unimportant) to 5 (of the greatest importance for the store manager's work). The judges were in four groups: superiors, managers, assistants, and psychology students.

Results showed that only five categories had been rated as rather unimportant by all four groups although the range between the groups was 6-15. Since there were 86 subcategories, the researchers concluded the critical incident technique had revealed behavioral units considered important for the manager's job. Correlation studies of this same data showed that subcategories containing fewer incidents may still be important ones and so one must be careful not to regard frequency alone as a measure of the importance of a behavior unit.
Andersson and Nilsson concluded that their study gave a positive impression of the critical incident method, and that they were justified in concluding that material collected by that method was both reliable and valid.

In summary, it can be seen that although self-esteem is considered an important concept, widely discussed and researched, it is difficult to find concrete descriptions of events influencing adult self-esteem. Most research tends to subsume specific 'event' variables under abstract classifications.

To isolate these specific events influencing adult self-esteem, the critical incident technique has been applied to developing categories based on the direct observation of behavior.
CHAPTER TWO
Methodology

In this chapter, the steps of the study are outlined under five headings, covering areas from subject selection to comparison of categories established with subject characteristics.

Subjects

Volunteer subjects were recruited by letter from the address list of an urban church (see Appendix B). Letters were sent to 90 members who filled the following criteria: over 21 years old, and absence of a mental disorder or mental retardation.

Thirty-seven people agreed to participate. The first 20 who were available for the interview were chosen as the sample group. The group comprised 13 women and 7 men ranging in age from 24 - 49, with the majority being 30 - 36. Single, married and divorced people were represented. Nine people had children.

Education ranged from high school graduation to doctoral studies, with the majority having some post-secondary education and 7 having post-graduate experience. Occupations represented were such as laboratory technician, theology
student, housewife and nurse. Three subjects were unemployed. All subjects viewed themselves as Christians.

The Critical Incident Interview

To answer the question what enhances or detracts from adults' self-esteem, the subjects were asked to describe incidents which had influenced their self-esteem level in the last year. An outline of the interview is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Outline of the Critical Incident Interview

Purpose of the study: My study is on adults' self-esteem. Most of the present research is on how children develop their esteem, not on what makes a difference to us as adults. So, I'm doing a basic type of research on this by asking people to tell me about specific incidents that have influenced their self-esteem for better or worse. What I would like to hear from you are specific stories, from the last year, of incidents that have made you
feel better or worse in your opinion of yourself.

Request for recall: Could you tell me a specific incident now? Try to tell exactly what happened, as if you were back in the situation and experiencing it again.

Request for additional details: (These questions were used only if the incident recalled was unclear.)
What led up to the incident?
How strongly did it affect you? (test for criticalness of the incident)
Why was it so helpful/harmful?

Additional Interview Data

As well as the critical incident interview, other data were collected in order to compare the categories of incidents with other characteristics of the subjects. The information collected was: sex, age, marital status, and self-esteem score, as measure by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

The following statement was made to subjects following critical incident collection:

From the incidents I'm going to
establish theme categories to
describe various groups of incidents,
perhaps such as achievement or
dealing with failure. After I decide on those themes, and
as a secondary interest, I'm going to compare them to different
characteristics of the people I've interviewed. The characteristics
will be sex, age, marital status and answers on this self-esteem scale
that I'd like you to fill out now (see Appendix A).

Summary of Data Collection and Procedures

After initial contact by letter, subjects who had volunteered were telephoned to set a time and place for the interview. Most interviews took place in the subjects' homes but some were at the researcher's when the subject found it more convenient.

At the interview, the consent form was first explained and signed, with emphasis placed on confidentiality (see Appendix C). The purpose and uses of taping were described.

The interview was conducted by the researcher following
the critical incident interview and the additional interview data procedures as previously described. At the end, subjects were offered the opportunity to ask questions and were informed that a copy of the results and conclusions would be made available upon request.

The tapes were first transcribed by the researcher and then abstracted onto 3" x 5" cards, isolating the critical event from other data. Each subject was assigned a number identifying all data collected.

Categories were formed following Flanagan's guidelines described in the previous chapter. Two independent raters were chosen to determine the reliability of the categories.

Comparison of Categories to Subject Characteristics

To meet the secondary objective of comparing selected subject characteristics to categories, tables were created which grouped subjects according to the characteristic being examined. The characteristics were age, sex, marital status and self-esteem level.

Self-esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965, 1979) which is a 10-item Guttman scale. Respondents were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the 10 items which are of a global nature such as "I feel that I have a number of good qualities"
and "I wish I could have more respect for myself". The scores of the 10 items are combined to yield a 7-point scale. The measure is reproduced in Appendix A.

This scale was chosen because it measured global self-esteem and for its ease of administration and scoring compared to measures such as the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is well established in the literature (Wylie, 1974 and Wells and Marwell, 1976). Rosenberg (1979) reports satisfactory internal reliability based on reproducibility and scalability coefficients. Two separate tests of two-week test-retest reliability resulted in \( r = .85 \) and \( r = .88 \) on small college samples.

Construct validity has been supported by studies confirming the expected empirical relationships with depressive affect, anxiety and peer-group reputation.

Convergent and discriminant validity are reported as being supported in several studies described in Rosenberg, 1979.
CHAPTER THREE

Results

For this critical incident study on what enhances or detracts from adult self-esteem, five categories are described and examples given. The results of various reliability and validity checks are discussed. As the secondary focus of this study, categories are compared to subject characteristics. Two additional findings of note are included.

Descriptive Data

From the 20 volunteer subjects, 113 usable incidents were collected, averaging 6 per subject. Several subjects contributed 1 - 2 or 10 - 11 incidents although most gave between 4 and 8.

The categorization produced 5 major categories with no need for sub-categories. The 5 categories are:

1. Confirmation by Others
2. Overcoming Deficits
3. Acceptance by Others
4. Sense of Mutuality
5. Sense of Achievement

The categories contained a range of 16 - 27 critical
incidents each, with the first two having 27 in each. Table 2 indicates the number of incidents in each category, divided into positive and negative responses, that is, enhancing and detracting incidents. Shown also are the percentage of total incidents for each grouping and the sum of all incidents in a category.

### TABLE 2

Category of Incident by Positive and Negative Nature of Incident

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Nature of Incident</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Confirmation by Others</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Overcoming Deficits</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Acceptance by Others</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sense of Mutuality</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sense of Achievement</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 also demonstrates that the categories were rank ordered by total number of incidents in each. A fairly even spread is observed.
Definitions and Examples of the Categories

This section presents descriptions of the categories and sample incidents to illustrate the contents of each category.

Category 1: Confirmation by Others

**Definition:** Confirmation from sources outside the self of a specific trait, skill, or performance.

This category included a number of job- or profession-related incidents but also contained references to parenting, church leadership functions and even one incident on the affirming qualities of a personality test.

**Examples**

**Enhancing:** I got praise and encouragement about teaching in church, both before and after I did it. This increased my self-confidence.

**Detracting:** My boss complimented my conference presentation and then belittled it as 'interesting trivia'.

Category 2: Overcoming Deficits

**Definition:** Overcoming a negative personal characteristic, breaking a bad habit. Working to improve a poor relationship. Overcoming adverse circumstances.

Subjects reported in this category that it was enhancing to their self-esteem to change behaviors such as nervousness,
thinking negatively, procrastination and egocentricity. Improving overall relationships or specific attitudes with others was also important. Detracting incidents were often about repeating known negative behaviors such as inappropriate expression of anger or self-criticism.

Examples: Enhancing: Through a weight clinic, I've recently lost 30 pounds and learned how my emotions affect my eating. I feel good about how I look and my ability to avoid overeating.

Detracting: I expressed anger towards my husband because he wasn't helping me with the children. I know that hurts him and I know I didn't deal with my irritation properly. It's something I've done a number of times and wish I hadn't done again.

Category Three: Acceptance by Others

Definition: A general acceptance of a person from sources outside the self, not based on particular behaviors or, in spite of certain behavior. Includes expressions of acceptance, affection and support.

This category demonstrates acceptance by significant others but also by acquaintances in a variety of situations. God was frequently mentioned as a source of love and affirmation, experienced in a variety of ways. That the
category contained the highest proportion of detracting incidents, perhaps indicates the strong significance of rejection and criticism to self-acceptance.

Examples: Enhancing: When my child was bad in front of my father, he surprised me by reacting with sympathy to both of us. I felt loved, accepted and supported.

Detracting: In a class I criticized the others' approach to the topic. Later I realized that all I'd done was alienate them and so they rejected me.

Category Four: Sense of Mutuality

Definition: An experiencing of similarity, closeness or belonging.

A number of incidents here were about experiences of mutuality with family members, friends or God. The detracting incidents were ones pointing out alienation from others such as jealousy in a friend or cultural estrangement.

This category and Acceptance by Others have the closest relationship. A sense of mutuality necessarily includes a degree of general acceptance of each other. Discrimination between the categories was based on the subject's report of mutuality or acceptance being the most critical esteem factor. Still, a small selection of incidents were found to include
equal aspects of both categories and so were not included in category totals. An example of an incident from this category is: During a visit by my parents, from out of town, they acknowledged that my home was now here, they saw why I liked it, and they approved of my friends. We were able to enjoy one another as adults.

Examples of the Sense of Mutuality Category

Enhancing: I gave a speech about how I became a Christian because I felt God wanted me to. Because I obeyed, my speaking was Spirit-led, not ego-led. The sense of walking closely with God made me feel good about myself.

Detracting: I just moved back from 11 years in Europe and Africa. I'm experiencing a large sense of loss of friendships, support systems, and places. Nothing is familiar, I feel isolated and insecure with no relationship between my past and future. I need to redefine myself.

Category Five: Sense of Achievement

Definition: Identifying for oneself a skill well done or an area of accomplishment.

Achievements or failures here occurred in a wide variety of settings: home, jobs, schooling, friendships and volunteer work.

Examples: Enhancing: I'm proud of my parenting ability; how I do together with my wife and how my child is in terms of who she is and what I've taught her.
Detracting: In leading a church service, I felt well organized but also that I hadn't had enough time to think through my ideas on it. I was disappointed in myself, that I could have done better.

Reliability and Validity

Flanagan observed that "the extent to which a reported observation can be accepted as a fact depends primarily on the objectivity of this observation. By objectivity is meant the tendency for a number of independent observers to make the same report" (1954, p.335).

This section will show how objectivity was reviewed in thesis by several means. Reliability of the categories was checked by having two independent raters re-classify the incidents. Validity was looked for by checking how many subjects contributed to each category, whether detracting and enhancing incidents were well represented in each category and whether independent judges felt the categories were representative of the range of factors contributing to adult self-esteem. A slightly different form of validity is seen in the comparison of this study with the cited self-esteem literature.
Independent Rater Reliability Checks

Two raters (A and B) were selected to perform this check independently. Rater A was provided with a list of the categories and their definitions and a random selection of 50 incidents to classify. Several sample incidents were classified by the researcher to demonstrate the method. This rater achieved a 70% level of agreement the researcher's classification. The procedure acted as a pilot study pointing out the need for improvement in several of the category's definitions and for added descriptions of detractor categories.

The improved descriptions and most of the same incident cards were presented to Rater B. This final sort resulted in a 92% agreement with the classification system, indicating strong reliability.

Participation Rate

Another way of determining objectivity in this study was by reviewing the number of subjects reporting incidents in each category. The rates of participation are reported in Table 3.
TABLE 3
Number of Subjects Reporting per Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent of Total Subjects</th>
<th>Number of Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Confirmation by Others</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Overcoming Deficits</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Acceptance by Others</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sense of Mutuality</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sense of Achievement</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than half of the subjects reported incidents in each category. The rank ordering of the categories by number of subjects reporting per category is similar to the already established rank order by number of incidents reported per category.

Oppositional Reinforcement

As well as number of subjects reporting any incident in a category, validity can also be demonstrated by the rate of enhancing and detracting incidents per category. This is given per incident in Table 2 and per subject in Table 4, as raw numbers and as a percentage of the total sample.
TABLE 4

Number of Subjects Reporting Positive or Negative Incidents per Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subjects Reporting</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive %</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Negative %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Confirmation by Others</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Overcoming Deficits</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Acceptance by Others</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sense of Mutuality</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sense of Achievement</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All categories are supported by subjects reporting both enhancing and detracting incidents. This demonstrates that the categories are valid in that a lack of, or detraction from, the esteem factor has a significant effect on self-esteem level just as an enhancing incident does.

Content Validity Check

Content validity for the categories chosen was also checked by having the category definitions reviewed by three subjects. All had confirming comments to make such as, "Those
categories seem to fit with the things I told you," and "They make sense and there seem to be distinct differences between the categories."

Comparison of Results with the Literature Review

In Andersson and Nilsson's reliability and validity review of the critical incident technique, there was a fairly concrete literature in the form of job training manuals with which to compare the results. This is not so in the present study. As has been noted, the self-esteem literature is often conflicting and vague so there is no definitive body of knowledge to relate to the present study.

However, categories in this study show some relationships with ideas presented in the literature review.

Flanagan's study (1978) on the quality of life isolated some categories with parallels to the present study. This would appear logical given the similarity of some of his questions with the one at hand. His subjects were asked to describe important or satisfying experiences, sources of pleasure, and incidents with strong impact. Since self-esteem is an important determinant of what is satisfying, pleasurable, or significant to an individual, subjects were likely to report a number of incidents that enhanced their self-esteem.
Three of the five categories of the present study are other-related, that is, referring to esteem sources from outside the self, including Confirmation by Others, Acceptance by Others, and Sense of Mutuality. Parallel other-related information is seen in the Quality of Life Survey in three of its major headings which include 8 of the 15 categories listed. These major areas are Relations with Other People, Social, Community and Civic Activities, and Recreation.

The two self-related categories in the present study, Sense of Achievement and Overcoming Deficits also have parallels in the Quality of Life study. Flanagan's study mentions achievement under a number of the categories which include: material well-being and financial security, health (fitness), raising children, activities related to helping and encouraging others, intellectual development, and occupational role. Overcoming Deficits has much similarity with the personal understanding and planning category which is described in part as, "gaining insight into and acceptance of one's assets and limitations, experiencing and awareness of personal growth and development, and realizing the ability to influence the course of one's life significantly....For some people, a major component arises from religious or spiritual experiences or activities" (p. 139).

Coopersmith (1967) and Rosenberg (1965 and 1979) both approached their research from the social self-perspective
although they did find some limits on this view in terms of generalizability of any specific factor in relation to its effect on self-esteem. Coopersmith especially emphasizes in his results that the important social group is that of one's immediate interpersonal environment. This is congruent with the findings mentioned previously of three categories being other-related sources of self-esteem.

There are limits to comparability between these authors and the present research due to the differing research methods used. Although there are no conflicts between the results, there are also few unconditional confirmations among this research's categories, Coopersmith's factors and Rosenberg's principles. For example, two of Rosenberg's principles state that people come to view themselves as they are viewed by others, and that people evaluate themselves in comparison to others. This would generally support the importance of the categories about acceptance, confirmation, and mutuality, but Rosenberg is more concerned with the process a person goes through to conceive and evaluate the self where this critical incident study focuses on the events that influence the person, based on the assumption that a process is in place which evaluates events in a way that impacts self-esteem.

A similar parallel can be seen between Coopersmith's research (1967) and the study at hand. For his success factor
he discusses the importance of a person's immediate interpersonal environment as the determinant of standards of success and failure. The critical incidents collected in this study falling in the Confirmation by Others category, defined as confirmation from sources outside oneself of a specific trait, skill, or performance, are perhaps incidents that could be said to describe success and failure experiences as evaluated by others. The present study has focused on the event itself as the enhancer rather than the influence of the confirming source but by reviewing the transcriptions of the critical incidents it can be seen that the majority of the incidents involve friends, family and colleagues. It could be said tentatively that this confirmation category is supported by Coopersmith's success factor, but again, the comparison is between process and event and therefore somewhat tenuous.

The same type of tentative parallel exists between Coopersmith's values factor and the critical incident subjects found significant. Coopersmith said that values arose from those experienced in the home, school and peer groups of his young subjects. As with the success factor, incidents that were valued as significant to self-esteem in this study came mainly from home, work and peer groups. It cannot be determined from this study if the values that subjects now hold as important arose from childhood or current sources.

The incidents in the Sense of Achievement category
support Coopersmith's finding that a sense of success was not based so much on attaining material wealth, education and status as on success as defined by one's interpersonal environment. Family, friends and church activities predominated in the Achievement Category. Perhaps a Christian environment enhanced the importance of interpersonal and church success over material wealth and status.

In the Confirmation by Others category, another measure of success in terms of confirmation of traits, skills or performance, 11 of the 27 incidents are also friend, family and church related while the remainder are mainly related to vocational achievements.

Another point made in the self-esteem literature is the distinction between instrumentality and emotionality (Wells, 1976). Both of these factors are seen in the present study. Instrumentality or, evaluation in relation to achieving valued ends and social rewards, is seen in the categories of Sense of Achievement and Confirmation by Others, and mixed with emotionality in Overcoming Deficits. Emotionality or feelings about oneself not based on a utilitarian view but often in relation to moral or existential worth is seen in the categories of Acceptance by Others and Sense of Mutuality. In the emotionality mode is included viewing oneself honestly and acknowledging shortcomings but yet being able to live happily
and creatively. This aspect is illustrated by the Overcoming Deficits category where the majority of incidents relate to accepting shortcomings yet having a positive enough attitude about oneself to believe they can be changed.

Comparison of Categories to Subject Characteristics

The subject characteristics selected for comparison were age, sex, marital status, and self-esteem score. After reviewing the subjects, marital status was deleted due to the wide variation in a small sample.

To evaluate the other characteristics, tables were set up grouping the subjects according to the characteristic being examined. Comparing subject age to incident categorization yielded no special relationships but demonstrated that the major age grouping in the study, the 30 to 36 year-olds, contributed the greatest number of incidents per subject, confirming that this study examines mainly a middle adulthood group.

The comparison of sex of subject to category showed that few males reported incidents in the Confirmation by Others category while 10 of 13 females each contributed several incidents in this category.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale rated all subjects as having moderate to high global self-esteem. The moderate group had a greater proportion of negative to positive

Additional Findings

Since the critical incident technique records events in discrete and positive or negative categories, there is a group of events in this study that appeared as very critical to subjects' self-esteem but which has not been clearly seen yet because of the nature of the research method. These events are ones which are detracting to self-esteem at the time they occur but lead to a process of personal change having an enhancing effect on the individual's self-worth.

One subject summed this up well, saying, "Most situations these days aren't just negative influences but part of learning and growing. I can work through things that screwed up. It's important to keep going, to have the perseverance and strength to overcome."

A number of these incidents obviously fall in the Overcoming Deficits category although they are of necessity described as either enhancing or detracting or, with a complex event, it is divided into both the positive critical incident and the negative one. Since the affect and emphasis with which these change incidents were told were quite strong, the researcher believes such events are critical to adult
self-esteem. Because of this, one incident will be presented as a case study. The transcription will be followed by a discussion.

I've had a difficult work situation in the last year. I was promoted to a leadership position. But some problems arose and my supervisors didn't see me as trustworthy or supporting of them. I was labelled to my face a rebel, because they thought I was undermining them. There were some things I didn't agree with but my intent was not to knowingly undermine them. Because I see my most important characteristics as loyalty and trustworthiness, this was decimating to me. I was withdrawn, lonely and introspective because I was challenged. I was angry with them but generally blamed myself.

But by late in the year I was seeing for myself some leadership things that I did that were unhelpful to those under me. I had learned more about how my actions influence others. Perhaps I hadn't realized my power and influence as a supervisor.

By the end of the year I was labelled the psychological leader, meaning that in relationship I had initiated, enhanced, and modeled. I also improved in delegation and similar skills. When things were better I was extroverted, fun; lively and willing to take on extra things.

When I left the job at the end of that difficult year, having worked in the place for over three years, a number of people told me they liked me, that they liked my work with the clients, and they enjoyed working with me. They mentioned my sense of humor and other things. This was good for me, especially because the last year had been my first experience ever of people wondering about me in such a negative way.

It is clear that much of this experience was detracting to the subject's self-esteem, especially as it was initially
incongruent with his self-view. However, over an extended period of self-observation, and probably much concern and thought, he became able to see more clearly his helpful and unhelpful leadership behaviors. He was obviously valued and respected by those under him and viewed positively by many when he left. He was left in a much stronger position of self-knowledge at the end of this time.

It would be superficial to say a negative event was turned into a positive one. Some hurt remains with the subject now, eight months later, but still the detracting event enabled a leader to develop in understanding and behavior and to leave feeling appreciated by a number of co-workers.

This type of experience seems to be based on the ability to accept and analyze negative experiences without excessive defensiveness and to believe that change is within one's locus of control. Often it also means a sustained effort to change one's characteristics or relationships. It would be interesting to see this process researched as a way in which adults may be able to improve their global self-esteem.

Another finding of this study, due to the population sample being drawn from a church, is the alternate source of self-esteem that a relationship with God brings. This was evident in 14 incidents. Two subjects summarized it this way: "As long as I remember God loves me, I can think of myself as wonderful, then other people can like me too," and "God is the
one who gives self-esteem. He shows me how much he loves me and accepts me as I am, and then encourages me to change to be even better". These statements typify the view that self-esteem becomes less subject to negative events through this enhancing relationship.
CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest some answers to the research question, "What enhances or detracts from self-esteem in adulthood".

Using the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954), five categories were discovered. Twenty subjects provided 113 incidents; 74 were positive and 39 were negative. At least 50% of the subjects contributed to each category, with a range of 16 to 27 incidents in each category.

Reliability was tested. Results of the initial rater produced improved category definition. A second rater achieved a reliability of .92, suggesting reliability of the data.

This chapter considers the limitations of the study and the implications in relation to theory, practice and future research. The chapter ends with a summary of the research.

Limitations

A clear limitation to the generalizability of findings from this study is seen in the restricted nature and size of the sample. The 20 subjects are volunteers and from a non-denominational evangelical church. Volunteers may differ
greatly from non-responding subjects. In this study, two possible biases in the findings may have occurred. Firstly, the researcher received several responses from those who were sent the request for participation letter stating that they did not want to participate because they were going through a hard time. There may be some correspondence between similar reasons for non-response and the absence of subjects with low self-esteem scores. Secondly, volunteers have the characteristic of a higher need for social approval (Borg and Gall, 1979). The majority of critical incidents and categories in this study have been noted to be other-directed, that is receiving self-enhancing information from sources outside the self. Although much of the self-esteem literature would support such a view, results still may have been skewed towards external sources of reinforcement.

Of the 20 subjects, only 7 were male. There were some reported differences between the number of incidents males and females contributing to certain categories. This may be due to the restricted size of the sex samples or to sex-typed reporting.

Another limitation is based on Flanagan's comment (1954) that memory for incidents improved if observers knew in advance what was to be remembered. Subjects often found it took them a while to begin thinking of their experiences in a way that answered the research question and several said they
would have liked to think about it in advance. Once subjects began reporting their incidents, a number found that they had more information to give than time had allowed. More incidents may have been collected in the limited time if subjects had advance knowledge of the question.

The size of the sample and limited-time interview affected the total number of incidents available for categorization, with possible influence on the number of categories and definite influence on the lack of subcategories.

These categories were formulated by one researcher leaving open the possibility of personal bias. Two raters assisted in categorization reliability checks, the second resulting in a reliability of 92%.

Self-reports also are open to personal bias. One type of response-set is the direction of social desirability and as it has been noted that volunteers often need social approval, these effects may enhance each other and affect the results. This bias may have been reduced by the personal interview style of this research and the interviewing skills of the researcher which make it more likely that subjects will reveal negative aspects of the self (Borg and Gall, 1979).

Although several types of validity checks were described as demonstrating support of the findings in the results, a
difficulty was demonstrated in attempting to relate the results to some of the literature. This was the problem of trying to relate research on the process of self-esteem to the present events style of research. These same studies, Coopersmith and Rosenberg, were also on children and adolescents rather than adults. These two factors constitute a limitation on checking validity of the findings.

**Theoretical Implications**

Despite the aforementioned limitations concerning the literature, parallels have been demonstrated which suggest congruence with social self-theory. These parallels, along with the Quality of Life survey on adults, suggest that social reinforcement is of ongoing importance in adulthood. It remains to be seen how internalizing values and standards differ the influence of the social environment on adults compared to children.

In the area of working to improve adult self-esteem, the category of Overcoming Deficits and the additional finding of the role of detracting incidents in stimulating long-term positive change are logically important areas but appear to have received less attention in the literature than their importance to subjects in this study would suggest they deserve.
In addition to the comparison of the results of this study to the literature review presented in the previous chapter, this study can be seen to lend some support to psychological theories which include discussion of some aspect of self-esteem.

In client-centered therapy, Rogers states that an individual's need for positive regard can only be met by others. Because adults, especially parents, rarely provide unconditional positive regard, children grow up learning to devalue some part of their experience because significant others have done so (Corsini, 1973, p. 130-131). With adults, client-centered psychotherapy is meant to provide an atmosphere of unconditional positive regard to enable a client to once again accept, without devaluation, all of his self-experiencing.

This unconditional positive regard, defined as acceptance of a person's individuality (Corsini, p. 127), is quite similar to this researcher's category of Acceptance by Others and once again emphasizes the significance of other-related categories.

The devaluing of experience that affects the child's self-worth continues to affect it in adulthood as can be seen in the negative incidents contributing especially to the categories of Sense of Achievement, Overcoming Deficits, and Confirmation by Others, as described in this study.
In Gestalt theory it is postulated that children are taught to mistake approval for acknowledgement. Since acknowledgement is necessary to survival, the child creates an acceptable social face, a self-image, to gain approval (Corsini, p. 264). Because all of the self cannot now be accepted, parts of the personality refuse to accept other parts and symptoms of a conflicted personality can occur. In therapy, the goal is for the conflicting personality parts to appreciate one another. This results in cessation of conflict which leads to a combining of the parts into a more integrated whole person (Corsini, p. 269).

A somewhat similar process is seen in this researcher's report on additional findings. A number of subjects gained a strong esteem benefit from overcoming deficits, which is necessarily based on facing and accepting less desirable personality aspects.

Subjects also benefited from their whole selves being accepted by others. In Gestalt terms this would be called receiving acknowledgement rather than approval based on performance. According to Gestalt theory, people learn to seek approval rather than acknowledgement. The adults in the present study demonstrated the importance of this approval from others in the Confirmation by Others category, and from themselves in the Sense of Achievement category.
Practical Implications

Counsellors could benefit from the results of this study in several ways. The categories overall could be used as a checklist to assess areas where adults are or are not receiving self-esteem reinforcement. Categories could be similarly used as suggestions of areas in which clients may benefit by eliciting enhancing incidents or avoiding detracting ones.

Particular categories also provide insights for practice. It is widely understood that a general acceptance of the client by the counsellor is important. The Acceptance by Others category supports this, but the study also shows that confirmation of specific traits or abilities was mentioned just as frequently by the subjects. Counsellors could provide more emphasis on strength confrontation and affirmation on the basis of this.

Overcoming Deficits was a category to which 80% of subjects contributed. For clients reporting a positive incident, the contribution to self-esteem was quite strong. This may indicate for counsellors the importance of early goal-setting in the course of counselling to encourage and motivate the client.

The Sense of Mutuality category reinforces the
significance of relationship between counsellor and client and also the need for people to be in relationship, both personal and spiritual.

In collecting the incidents, the researcher found a number of subjects to be quite encouraged by reviewing positive contributions to their self-esteem. Perhaps a similar technique could be used in counselling situations to determine an individual's sources of self-esteem, or the lack of them, and areas that could be focused on in reinforcing self-esteem.

In cognitive and Adlerian therapy there is a focus on myths or misbeliefs which adversely affect self-attitudes when they are taken on as truths. Many of these are overgeneralizations. Perhaps these might be countered by the technique of clients reporting positive critical incidents which refute generalized negative self-views.

Implications for Future Research

This critical incident study of adult self-esteem resulting in 5 categories from 113 incidents could be considered as an exploratory study. Replication is suggested with a larger and broader sample. This would assist in confirming the categories as more widely applicable and perhaps allow for subcategories. A larger sample could
compare male and female sub-groups for sex-typed reporting which was minimally visible in the present study. Comparison of results also could be made with a low self-esteem group, looking for differences in sources of esteem reinforcement and ratio of negative to positive incidents.

This type of study could be interestingly combined with behavioral studies such as Marshall et al. (1982a and 1982b). Subjects could be asked what treatment or related incidents were influencing their esteem during various phases of the study. This could help in evaluating the effect of such non-treatment variables as the Hawthorne or John Henry effects. For example, in Marshall's second study (1982b) subjects were to have a relative or friend checking that they were following the protocol as well as a researcher contacting the subjects twice weekly. Such contacts might lead to incidents enhancing self-esteem in low self-esteem subjects who had been feeling socially isolated. Incident reporting could also be combined with the objects measures in Marshall's study to assist with their problem of determining which treatment was most effective.

Since self-esteem theory has been seen to contain vague and conflicting ideas, perhaps the specific behavior descriptions resulting from studies such as the present one could somehow be linked to other types of esteem studies which this researcher has described as contributing to a description
of the process of self-evaluation. The best understanding of adult self-esteem would probably arise from combinations of behavioral and cognitive-affective research.

Summary

This exploratory study using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) examines what enhances or detracts from adult self-esteem. The sample of 13 females and 7 males, ages 24 - 49, from a small urban church were chosen to represent a normal adult group.

Critical Incident interviews lasting one and a half hours resulted in 113 incidents. Subjects also completed a form recording age, sex, marital status and including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which were used to compare subject characteristics to categories formed from the critical incidents.

Five basic categories were found as follows: Confirmation by Others, Overcoming Deficits, Acceptance by Others, Sense of Mutuality and Sense of Achievement. Categories contained 16 to 27 incidents each and each category was contributed to by at least 50% of the subjects. These categories demonstrated an acceptable level of reliability.

Secondary comparisons between subject characteristics and categories demonstrated the the majority of data came from 30
to 36 year-olds and that no low self-esteem subjects were represented in the study.

Additional findings were that detracting incidents could have positive long-term benefits in promoting self-change and enhancing esteem, and also that a relationship with God provided an enduring source of self-esteem enhancement.

Results suggest the importance of social influences and self-change efforts on self-esteem.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

ADDITIONAL DATA COLLECTED FROM SUBJECTS

THEMES IN ADULT SELF-ESTEEM – ADDITIONAL DATA

A. ROSENBERG SELF ESTEEM SCALE

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. SA A D SD
2. At times I think I am no good at all. SA A D SD
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. SA A D SD
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. SA A D SD
5. I feel I do not have too much to be proud of. SA A D SD
6. I certainly feel useless at times. SA A D SD
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. SA A D SD
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. SA A D SD
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. SA A D SD
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself. SA A D SD

B. Sex  F  M

Age __

Marital Status ____________
APPENDIX C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

Consent to participate in the research for "Themes in Adult Self-Esteem," conducted by Dr. L. Cochran and Phyllis Gilchrist

I have been informed of the following aspects of this research:

- The interview will include describing specific experiences which have enhanced or detracted from my self-esteem and responding to the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

- The interview will be audiotaped and heard only by Dr. L. Cochran and Phyllis Gilchrist.

- An anonymous transcription will be made of the tape to be used for research purposes. The tape will then be erased.

- The interview will last about two hours. The interviewer will answer questions concerning the research before and after the interview.

- I may withdraw from the research at any time during the project.

Knowing the above and having received a copy of this consent form, I agree to participate in this research.

Subject

Interviewer